

## [Cotton and Horseshoes]

Life Story

COTTON AND HORSESHOES

(A Depression Victim Story)

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[? ?] Saul

Cotton Factor and

Warehouseman

731 Reynolds St.

D. T.

COTTON AND HORSESHOES

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"Certainly, I can spare you a little time." David Black remarked with a merry twinkle in his eye. "Since the government entered business, time is the thing we have the most of."

It required quite some time to find this office which is located two or three doors from the Cotton Exchange. Shortly after we had exchanged greetings Mr. Black was called out to the warehouse and I took the opportunity to glance around. As far as equipment went, the office was a facsimile of others of its kind. The unique feature was the array of horseshoes that adorned the walls and even the electric cords. Above the desk hung a large horseshoe, fashioned of thirteen small ones. Some were new and shiny, some old and rusty, and there was even one that was rough and home-made.

When Mr. Black returned to the office I said:

"Well if there's any truth in the old adage pertaining to horseshoes you certainly should have an abundance of good luck."

"I don't believe in that old superstition." He replied with a grin. "I have them for identification. In case a customer should forget my name he would possibly remember the display of horseshoes, which after all is a bit unusual. Should this happen he could at least ask for the darn fool who has all 2 the horseshoes hanging in his office.

"Seriously though," he went on. "There are fifty of them in all. One to represent each year I have worked in the cotton business."

Just outside the office, enclosed with iron grillwork, was the bookkeeping department. Several men were working at long desks. A large iron safe constituted the only other equipment in the room.

The sample room was located in the front portion of the warehouse. Mr. Black explained that a place must be selected where the greatest amount of light would fall on the tables

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where the cotton samples were classified. The grade and the initials of the owner are indicated on a slip of paper and rolled inside of the sample.

“Do you want me to go back to the beginning. Well, my friend, that's a long way.” He said thoughtfully.

“I am a native Augustan as was my father. But my mother was a Charlestonian. I first saw the light or day on June 15, 1875. My grammar school education was obtained at the old Central School and I attended the Richmond Academy for a year.

“I married an Augusta girl and we have two sons, who also make their home here. Both of them were graduated from the Richmond Academy, spent two years at Junior College and completed their educations at [Sine?] Hill College in Alabama. Then they returned to Augusta and entered the cotton factorage and 3 warehouse business. The elder boy married last June and he and his wife live with us. The other one is also at home and both are doing well.

“I am now 65 years old and have lived my entire life in this fair city, with the exceptions of three years which I spent in Charleston during my young manhood.

“Fifty years is a long time to work in one line of business.” David Black said pensively. “I went to work on Cotton now when I was only fifteen years old and am now rounding out my fiftieth year.

“Many and drastic changes have taken place during the half century I have worked close to the old Savannah River. The most important and effective change was undoubtedly when the government entered the cotton business. The many restrictions and the various taxes imposed on the business people have caused potents cuts in overhead expenses.

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"In other words where formerly business concerns made contracts at the beginning of the cotton season for twelve months, in many instances they are now forced to make them for only 30-day periods.

"There is a resultant unrest and uncertainty for both employer and employee. It is very much like the Good Book says: 'You know not the day nor the hour.' The cotton factor has come to feel that the incentive to reach out for voluminous trade has been taken away. [?] he limits his business so as to take as few chances as possible.

"The businessman of today is very much like the Irishman, who, upon becoming weary of his arduous tasks, decided he needed a vacation. When he applied to the agent for a ticket, the man asked Pat if he would like to have a return ticket. Pat replied: 'Faith, no, can't you see I'm already here?'

"Prior to the World War, Augusta was one of the largest cotton centers in the South. In days gone by when farmers were allowed to raise as much cotton as they wished, more than once Augusta's receipts totalled a half million bales of cotton per season. Now the total is not over 150,000 bales.

"Yes," he went on reminiscently, "Cotton Row has undergone some drastic changes.

"In former years when cotton was king, Cotton Row was the most popular place in town. Warehouses overflowed; and the streets where they were located were almost [?] because the excess had to be placed on the sidewalk. There was always a great deal of excitement and the streets were fairly alive with samplers, weighers, and markers. Business was booming and the surrounding territory had the appearance of an ant bed, where the ants were hurrying back and forth getting their food stored away for the winter.

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"The cotton exchange building at that time was perhaps the busiest place in town. It was always crowded. Now we miss the familiar rhythmic chanting of the cotton men on the streets.

5

They indicated the brands on the bales by calling out: 'Betty, Dora, Emma, Molly, etc.' The first letters of the names indicated the brand but they used the whole names to avoid errors caused by the similarity of sound, say for instance in 'B' and 'd'. You can readily see there was no shadow of a doubt when they called out, 'Betty' and 'dora.'"

"Didn't the men who worked with the cotton wear long dusters over their suits?" I asked.

"Yes." He replied. "This was necessary in order to protect their clothes from the lint of the cotton and jute bagging, and from the ink they used for marking.

"Cotton people really made money in those good old times!" He exclaimed. "But when all's said and done we are making a living and things could be worse.

"This talk with you has recalled many things to my mind, some of them events that used to be part and pareel of Augusta's community life. Chief among these were the old fire parades, the street carnivals, and the cotton parades.

"The remains of the throns upon which old King Cotton ant in the parade is still in our sample room. In those days not only cotton but Cotton Row was the life of the town.

"The public could always call upon the cotton people for cooperation and also for generous donations whenever they were needed. At that time almost as many people visited the cotton factor's office as now frequent the banks. Everybody knew everybody 6 else. One could walk into any crowd and feel that he was not only known but welcome.

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"By the way, wouldn't you like to see the old throne that took such a prominent part in the old cotton parades?" Mr. Black asked.

"I can't think of anything that would give me more pleasure." I replied promptly. "And I should like to hear more of the cotton parade."

We continued to talk as we strolled slowly toward the sample room.

"Who portrayed King Cotton and when did the parade take place?" I wanted to know.

"Well, it was away back some fifty odd years ago, I guess." He said thoughtfully. "And the King was a fine old man, whom we knew as Uncle Josh! He passed into the Great Beyond many years ago.

"The parade was always held at night on Broad Street. The floats were decorated farm wagons, delivery wagons, and other vehicles. They were all loaded with cotton and were lighted with lanterns that burned coal oil."

By this time we had arrived at the sample room where the old [?] was preserved. The thick pieces of pine timber from which it is made have become rough and dirty. The back is about three-and-a-half feet high and is fashioned of two twelve inch boards.

7

In its [?] days the old throne was covered with lint cotton, and cotton in the bolls furnished the frills. Practically all of the one-time decoration has disappeared; one arm is lost, and the bottom is gone.

We were both lost in memory for a few moments, for I, too, have spent many years in Augusta. Mr. Black was the first to break the silence.

"All of these things I have told you today would mean absolutely nothing to the young people of this generation. To them they would be purely the ramblings of an old man.

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However, I believe there are quite a number of the older ones who would recall them as fond recollections. The day of the minuet and waltz have passed and the rhumba and 'sans-Susy' have replaced them. The motto seems to have become - On with the dance; drink and be merry and let joy be unrefined.

He concluded rather sadly: "And thus have the prosperous days of Cotton Row passed into history. It is now like 'the calm after the storm.'"